



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1997

AT
(202) 616-2771
TDD (202) 514-1888

JUSTICE DEPARTMENT URGES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO REMOVE SCHOOL CREDIT TRANSFER BARRIERS IMPOSED BY REGIONAL ACCREDITING AGENCY

Justice says Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Restrictions Stifle Students' Ability to Transfer School Credits

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Department of Justice is urging the Department of Education to eliminate unreasonable restrictions on the transfer of school credits imposed by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) because they make it difficult for students to transfer credits from an institution accredited by a non-SACS agency to a SACS-accredited institution.

"SACS' restrictions hurt those who are least able to afford them--students and workers who attend post-secondary technical, vocational and career schools and now wish to continue their education while getting some credit for their past coursework," said Joel I. Klein, Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Justice Department's Antitrust Division. "Other accrediting agencies allow them to transfer credits, but in its region, SACS makes it very difficult."

In a letter filed yesterday with the Department of Education, the Justice Department requested that Education require SACS to adopt a more reasonable transfer of credit

policy. SACS is one of the six Department of Education-recognized regional accrediting agencies.

The Department's Antitrust Division filed its letter after receiving complaints from accrediting agencies, post-secondary institutions, and students harmed by SACS' restrictive rules and practices.

SACS' unreasonable restrictions on transferring credits hurt students who must take and pay for redundant coursework or who are discouraged from pursuing their education, the Department said. They also hurt post-secondary institutions whose courses may not transfer, competing accrediting agencies, and federal and state governments that subsidize post-secondary education.

SACS' Commission on Colleges accredits about 780 higher education institutions in the South, ranging from two-year technical and community colleges to comprehensive universities. SACS' recognition by the Department of Education permits students enrolled at its member institutions to be eligible for Title IV funding.

Credit for coursework completed at another institution has become an increasingly important issue as education has become a life-long process for workers who return to school to add to their skills and enhance their credentials. SACS accredits all or nearly all of the traditional colleges and universities in the South that are the likely "receiving" institutions for the transfer of credit.

SACS has adopted rules and practices that permit its member institutions to grant credit only for coursework completed at

schools belonging to SACs or the other five regional accrediting associations. The only exceptions to this require SACS' members to meet an extensive documentation requirement. SACS' rules and practices are more restrictive than those of other Department of Education-recognized accrediting agencies, including the other five regional accrediting agencies.

Usually, the decision whether to grant credit for transferred coursework is initially left to a post-secondary institution's discretion. Accrediting agencies may review these decisions to determine if the receiving institution has exercised that discretion appropriately.

SACS revised its transfer of credit criteria and practices in 1994-95 while its Commission on Occupational Education Institutions (COEI) was preparing to leave SACS. This followed a dispute with COEI over whether COEI could accredit technical colleges. COEI has since become the Council of Occupational Education (COE) which accredits technical colleges.

COE, the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCT), and the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS) are the three Department of Education-recognized accrediting agencies that are particularly harmed by SACS' restrictive transfer of credit practices. Their members currently enroll more than 100,000 students in the South.

###